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YING STAG PLAYS + NO. 9.



The
WIDOW'S VEIL
by Alice Rostetter

EGMONT ARENS • NEW YORK



THE FLYING STAG PLAYS
For the Little Theatre

No. 9

THE WIDOW'S VEIL

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The WIDOW'S VEIL
A Comedy in One Act ▼ by
Alice Rostetter :: as played by
the Provincetown Players



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CHARACTERS

KATY MACMANUS (she's young and married)
MRS. PHELAN, her neighbor, to your left.

VOICES AND OTHER SOUNDS

TIME: Twenty-four hours and not so long ago.
PLACE: The meeting place of tender-hearted
women. The floor's the fifth.

THE WIDOW'S VEIL

was first produced by the Provincetown Players
at the Playwrights' Theatre, New York, on Jan-
uary 17, 1919, with the following cast:

KATY MACMANUS, She's Young and Married,
Mary Payne
Her Neighbor, MRS. PHELAN, to Your Left,
Alice Rostetter

VOICES AND OTHER SOUNDS,
Lewis B. Ell and Others

Directed by George Cram Cook

243, July 1921

THE WIDOW'S VEIL

[The curtain rises on a dumb-waiter shaft. Rear, stands the opposite wall, the bricks worn a gray drab in the cracks. There's the rope in the center and the side ropes are vibrating still. The closed doors into the kitchens, right and left, are seen and there's silence on the two sides. The doors into the kitchens on the floors above and below can not be seen but the sounds emanating from them are distinguishable. From the floor above, the sixth floor left, comes muffled the crying of an irritable baby, and from the cellar comes a voice, bad-tempered and with an edge on it. 'Tis the voice, the official voice, of the Janitor.]

VOICE OF JANITOR

Garbage!

[The two kitchen doors on the floor below, the fourth floor, promptly open with two clicks, the two pails are slammed on and the two doors shut. The JANITOR is heard whipping down the dumb-waiter, dumping the two cans empty, replacing them, giving two of the shortest whistles. Then the dumb-waiter is whipped up; the two doors opened, the two pails taken off. The dumb-waiter appears at stage level, the fifth floor, and the two whistles shrill right and left. A careful step is heard and MRS. PHELAN opens the door.]

MRS. PHELAN

Good-mornin,' Mr. Kelly.

VOICE OF JANITOR

Garbage!

[*He blows, sharper than ever, the whistle of the kitchen, right. MRS. PHELAN is heard putting on her light pail. The dumb-waiter is whipped out of sight. MRS. PHELAN is revealed from the waist up; the merest glimpse of a kitchen wall and corner of a nearby table can be seen. MRS. PHELAN is very neat and in dull-colored clothes. The hope-of-better-things-turning-up never smiled from her face. Her hair is graying and drab-colored. She leans out and talks down.*]

MRS. PHELAN

I'll be takin' her milk off, Mr. Kelly. She's maybe sleepin',—or readin'—or

[*She leans across and knocks on the door; no one comes. The whistle, left, blows; the waiter shoots up. MRS. PHELAN takes off her pail and her neighbor's milk and bread. As the waiter shoots up to the floor above she is seen disappearing and her door slipping shut. On the sixth floor the two whistles blow and the two doors are opened and the crying of the baby comes down from the edge of the kitchen door, left.*]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR RIGHT

[An easy young voice and cheerful.]

Good-mornin', Mrs. Tynan, and how's the little one to-day?

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

[A sarcastic voice made bitter by lack of sleep.]

Ye can hear how, can't ye? Not a thing the matter with him save his father's bad temper.

[She slams on her pail, punctuating her belief.]

And I'll get that out of him, if I haf to—

[The door left slams shut.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR RIGHT

[Talking back into the room.]

And did you hear that, Maggie!

[She puts on her pail; then, as the vibrating ropes jerk tight, comes a sharp but polite—]

Can't you wait, Mr. Kelly. I've more for you.

[Slightly fainter, but distinct, as she bends to lift her package.]

And, Maggie, that's married bliss for you. It's us old maids

[Strong, as she puts on the package.]

is the lucky ones,

[The dumb-waiter flies down.]

believe me!

[Her door shuts. The pails are slammed back, the waiter flies past and up, the two whistles shrill and the cellar door bangs shut. The door, sixth floor left, opens, the baby squalling clear again; the pail snatched off and the door shut. The door, sixth floor right, opens.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR RIGHT

[As she removes pail and with politic smoothness, calling down—]

Mr. Kelly, will you be doin' me a small favor?

[Silence.]

Mr. Kelly!

[With sincerity.]

The old crank!

[The door is slammed shut. Silence. The wind makes a faint, mournful sound up the shaft. A voice from the floor below is heard humming a bit of happy song. The wind again keens faint. MRS. PHELAN opens her door, left, leans across and listens. There's no sound. She leans further out. After a second more she knocks, clear and determined. A step is heard. She knocks again. The door, right, opens slow.]

MRS. PHELAN

Good mornin', Mrs. MacManus.

[MRS. MACMANUS looks out. Ah, but she's young and pretty. The red hair on her is bright and warm as a flame; the white skin on her, soft. But she's pale and tired now and her two eyes have been weeping. She's on a blue kimono of the shade of her eyes when they're glad. Her depressed manner warms up with a flick of impatience as she answers.]

MRS. MACMANUS

Ah, it's you that can say good-mornin', Mrs. Phelan, and no troubles at all.

MRS. PHELAN

[*With pleasurable, but restrained, anticipation.*]

And is it trouble ye have?

MRS. MACMANUS

[*The gulp in her voice now.*]

Me man's wurse!

MRS. PHELAN

Wurse? And me not knowin' he was sick.

[*MRS. MACMANUS nods, biting her red lips to keep the weeping back.*]

Poor soul! pour soul!! But the good Lord will be helpin' ye, Mrs. MacManus. He—

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Sharp again.*]

I'm not doubtin' that, Mrs. Phelan, and me as good a Catholic as y'rself.

[*Her lips are at it again.*]

But—

Oh—oh—Mrs. Phelan, he's goin' on me!

MRS. PHELAN

Goin'? Houly Mary, is it dyin' ye mean?

[*MRS. MACMANUS, with a nod and a loud ketch in her voice, begins to sob.*]

There, there, now! Ye poor young thing! And me seein' him only yisterday buyin' the mornin' eggs for ye. Ttt-ttt! And him so hale and hearty—seemin'.

MRS. MACMANUS

'Twas near night he was taken. Ah—

[*In a burst of nervous, strained energy.*]

Mrs. Phelan, the horror is on me still, and me sittin' quiet and lone the night through!

MRS. PHELAN

☞

[*Visibly cheering.*]

Ah, be tellin' me all, Mrs. MacManus. 'Twill ease the heart of ye.

[*Briskly, working in her métier, gossip.*]

Let you bring up a chair and be kneelin' comfortable.

[*MRS. MACMANUS nods. They disappear, MRS. PHELAN reappearing first and fixing herself for a long talk. She shakes her head with the long sorrow, like a healthy person at a wake. She raises her hands in rich despair. MRS. MACMANUS reappears, arranging a bright shawl carefully over her shoulders; she drapes it over her shoulders, her features both woe-begone and interested in the hanging of the goods.*]

MRS. PHELAN

[*A little impatient.*]

It hangs fine, Mrs. MacManus. Be tellin' me all! 'Twill ease y'r heart.

[*MRS. MACMANUS leans, graceful and tired.*]

Begin at the beginnin'.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*The heartache in her voice.*]

Himself came home yester e'en and the clock at four.

MRS. PHELAN

At four! Was he red?

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Careful.*]

Not at four. He was white like—like—

MRS. PHELAN

[*Nodding, understanding.*]

the bit stone at the head of a gra—

MRS. MACMANUS

and the blood all gone from his face, Mrs. Phelan.

MRS. PHELAN

[*Nodding, fatal.*]

'Twas them chills.

MRS. MACMANUS

And his hand cold—cold as the hand of a marble saint.

MRS. PHELAN

Ye don't say that!

MRS. MACMANUS

And he'd the pain in his head and the throat of him burnin' like hot peat.

MRS. PHELAN

Ah, now, now! Ah, 'tis true, Mrs. MacManus, in the midst of life we're in death. And what's the doctor namin' it?

MRS. MACMANUS

And would he let a doctor in the house, and me beggin' him one hour by the clock and the tears in me eyes!

MRS. PHELAN

Ah, ye should not be askin' him, ye poor young bride. Just have the man in. I'll step around me-self and be askin' the doctor to have a look in.

MRS. MACMANUS

Ye're kind, Mrs. Phelan.

MRS. PHELAN

Not at all. But I'm feerin' it's too late. Them chills is—

[MRS. MACMANUS *breaks down and sobs.*]

There, there, now, dearie—

[*She pats her across the shaft, forcing hope, to be kind.*]

It's maybe it's only a germ it is, and them that thick in the street.

[MRS. MACMANUS *sobs the harder.*]

Now, now, ye'll blubber all the pretty out of y'r face.

[MRS. MACMANUS *fumbles about for a handkerchief.*]

Is it a hangkercheef ye want?

[*She extracts one from her apron belt.*]

Me cousin's after leavin' it here,

[*She examines the border.*]

on the way home from Mr. Reilly's wake.

[*She passes it across.*]

Ye'll not mind the black border, I hope.

[MRS. MACMANUS, *grasping it, sobs violently, like a child.*]

Ah, now, don't take on. It's not stretched out he is yet. Not yet, dearie. Not yet. Be tellin' me more and ease y'r heart.

[*She sums up brightly.*]

He came home at four and the hand of him all like the hand of a corpse. Ttt, ttt! And straight he wint for the bed. And then?

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Sobbing more quietly.*]

He wouldn't eat the meat I was fixin', the way he likes, with me own two hands. And at nine by the clock he starts mutterin' and tossin' and twistin' like a soul in the black depths of hell. And—

[*She looks up.*]

I takes a chair and I sits beside him and I tries catchin' hold of his hand and kissin' it, the way he'll be always doin' and him in his health. And—

[*A bright spark of anger lights up her eye.*]

Ye'll not believe what I'm tellin' ye, Mrs. Phelan.

MRS. PHELAN

[*Nodding affirmation.*]

Go on, Mrs. MacManus.

MRS. MACMANUS

What does he do but snatch back his hand and curses like the mad king of Kildare. And me—and me—

[*She resumes a gentle weeping.*]

MRS. PHELAN

[*Solemnly.*]

A ten-day bride! Go on, Mrs. MacManus.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*A little indistinctly.*]

And, says he, shoutin': "Can't ye be leavin' me, to die in peace—for one moment!" Oh, Mrs. Phelan, the red face of him, and his eyes closed in it.

MRS. PHELAN

[*Recording the change.*]

'Twas red by that—in spots?

MRS. MACMANUS

No, just plain. And me watchin' it the clock 'round.

MRS. PHELAN

[*Again summing up.*]

Red—and hot—and his mind bad. Poor young thing! Poor young thing! But go on, while ye can.

MRS. MACMANUS

And when the cold mornin' light comes stralin' in, and the clock at four, he stops mutterin' and tossin', and lies still, except for the sound in his throat.

MRS. PHELAN

Glory be to God, Mrs. MacManus, it's the end! It's the rattl—

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Alarmed.*]

What d'ye mean, Mrs. Phelan?

MRS. PHELAN

[*Rapidly, easing her own heart and keeping the raw truth, as she sees it, from Mrs. MacManus.*]

Ye'll be knowin' soon enough. Arra, arra, it's the like of that hangkercheef ye'll be usin' soon. But go on, Mrs. MacManus, go on. Ah, it's the night ye had.

MRS. MACMANUS

[Looking at her for further comfort.]

And sittin' on me chair, thinkin', it comes to me sudden and quick 'twas warnin' me Pat was, Sunday night last.

MRS. PHELAN

Warnin' ye?

MRS. MACMANUS

I'm knowin' now he had a presintement of what was to come. Says he—the night of Sunday—ye know his bright way—says he: "Katy, if I go to join the angels afore you do—"

MRS. PHELAN

Sakes!

MRS. MACMANUS

"—ye must be marryin' again. Ye're too pretty to be livin' alone, though," says he, smilin', "the widow's veil will become ye fine, and that hair warmin' the heart of a man. It'll set ye fine, Katy."

MRS. PHELAN

It will. Ye've a black skirt?

[MRS. MACMANUS gives a cry, all tears and despair, and a bit of protest. MRS. PHELAN speaks sternly.]

Ye must be ready, out of respect for the good man. Have ye a waist will do?

MRS. MACMANUS

[Muffled, patient, despairing.]

Me new one with the gold lace and—

MRS. PHELAN

[Nodding, business-like.]

the little vest! 'Twill do fine and easy fixed. Have ye a bit of a bonnet?

MRS. MACMANUS

The black one with the blue wing lyin' down at the side.

MRS. PHELAN

Fine! Yes, ye've the color for the veil. And ye'll not be buyin' it, Mrs. MacManus, for me cousin'll lend it to ye—

[A gesture of protest from MRS. MACMANUS. Reassuring her.]

and glad of the chance, Mrs. MacManus.

[MRS. MACMANUS is sobbing regularly and with less control each sob.]

She's after showin' it to me. It's that fine 'twould do y'r heart good. There, now! And the hem, Mrs. MacManus, the hem!

[MRS. MACMANUS gives a rending sob, flings up her two hands in an agony and disappears. The door shuts behind her. MRS. PHELAN shakes her head after her in real sympathy.]

The poor young thing!

[Then she straightens up, taking off her apron. Briskly.]

I'll be steppin' out now, for the doctor.

[The smile leaves her face and she nods her head reverently, talking as if in the presence of the corpse.]

And him that was always so hearty. Poor young thing, poor young thing!

[She slips out, closing her door quietly. All is still for a moment, then the faint wind is again beginning to be heard. The door, sixth floor left, opens and the crying of the baby, distant from an inner room, comes down. THE WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT rattles the dumb-waiter rope and waits. There's a careful, faint sound from the cellar, as the cellar door is opened on a crack.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

Mr. Kelly, there's no stame at all.

[Silence.]

There's not one drop of heat in the pipes and the children comin' home from school.

[Silence, with the breath of two people present in it.]

Y're there, Mr. Kelly, that I know. And I'll have the landlord on ye, for y'r insubordina—

[Door of fourth floor left opens. Joyous noise of hungry children.]

VOICE OF WOMAN FOURTH FLOOR LEFT

[A gentle, motherly voice.]

And here's the children, Mr. Kelly, and the pipes—

VOICE OF LITTLE GIRL

[Fourth floor left.]

Here's Johnny Phelan come for lunch, Mither.

VOICE OF JOHNNY PHELAN

Me mudder's out.

VOICE OF WOMAN FOURTH FLOOR LEFT

[Speaking into the room.]

Sit ye down there.

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

[Loud.]

This is me last wurd, Mr. Kelly. The breath is leavin' me body in the form of ice!

[There's a faint noise in the cellar of a door cautiously closed.]

VOICE OF WOMAN FOURTH FLOOR LEFT

[Bright and ready for a talk.]

Ye're right, Mrs. Tynan. He was there.

[The door above slams shut.]

[Speaking back into the room.]

Be givin' Johnny Phelan some of your tea.

[The door closes. Again, the sound of a faint wind. The whistle, sixth floor left, blows, with flowery indirection; the cellar door opens and a man whistles the first half of a phrase from Santa Lucia. The door of the sixth floor left opens.]

PLEASANT ITALIAN VOICE

Ice-a man, Lady?

[A wail from the baby escapes.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

[Baited, angry.]

No!

[The Italian completes with the phrase, closing the cellar door. Silence. A moment of wind. The whistle, sixth floor right, blows

with irritable precision. The cellar door opens. Pause. Whistle: irritable crescendo. Pause. Whistle. Pause.]

VOICE OF GROCER

[Teutonic and disagreeable.]

De grozzer!

Gott in Himmel, dieses—

[Door closes with restrained fury. Silence. Sounds, left, from MRS. PHELAN'S kitchen. She is moving about. A sizzling and pleasant smell escapes, as her door opens. She still has her hat on; her face is busy and cheerful. She disappears a moment and then reappears with part of bottle of milk and part of a loaf of bread. She knocks quietly but distinctly. She knocks a second time. The door right opens. MRS. MACMANUS stands, weak and pale and patient.]

MRS. PHELAN

[Handing the milk and bread across.]

Here's the mornin's milk, and y'r bread.

[MRS. MACMANUS takes them, putting them down right.]

And here's—

[MRS. PHELAN turns back and brings up from the nearby table, a tray with luncheon.]

a bit of lunch I'm after fixin' for you.

[She hands it across.]

Better late than never. Ye must eat, Mrs. Mac-Manus, even with the black sorrow in the house.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*In a weak voice.*]

It's only a sup of tea I've had and the day near its end. The lump in me throat—but I'll try, Mrs. Phelan.

MRS. PHELAN

Be puttin' it on the table there, so's we can talk.

[MRS. MACMANUS *does.*]

And himself—is he—

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Looking up, ready to take heart if she only may.*]

He's a bit conscious now—

[MRS. PHELAN'S *face drops.*]

but I'm not darin' to hope.

MRS. PHELAN

Y're right, Mrs. MacManus. They're always better before they're worse. I left word with the doctor.

[*Taking off her hat.*]

He was out deliverin' a woman. Awh, it's wonderful, Mrs. MacManus, the way a new soul comin' in brushes past the old one—

[*Pointing into MRS. MACMANUS' room.*]
goin' out.

[MRS. MACMANUS *chokes at bit on her toast.*
Cheering her.]

And now hear the good news. Me cousin's after lendin' ye the veil.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Putting down her tea.*]

Ah, the sharp sorrow's on me again at the word!

MRS. PHELAN

[Mechanically, undoing the package.]

Wisha, darlin', ye may never need it. And I have it right here.

[MRS. MACMANUS pushes the tray aside. Ingratiating.]

Will ye be seein' it? How soft it hangs!

[She is now holding the veil in the shaft.]

And the hem—it's two inches, it is. Will ye be weighin' it, in y'r hand; it's that light.

MRS. MACMANUS

[Weighing it.]

'Tis light.

MRS. PHELAN

Where's the bit hat ye was tellin' me of?

MRS. MACMANUS

It's under the bed. Himself maybe will be seein' me.

MRS. PHELAN

And what if he does, darlin', and the blue wing yet on it.

[MRS. MACMANUS passes back the veil and disappears. MRS. PHELAN holds it up, half draping it. MRS. MACMANUS hands over the hat.]

MRS. MACMANUS

[A tremor in her voice.]

I've the scissors here.

MRS. PHELAN

Thanks. Be drinkin' y'r tea, that's the gurl. Easy on,

[She snips off the wing.]

easy off. Let me see what way it looks on ye.

MRS. MACMANUS

[Putting it on deftly, giving a touch to her hair.]

It would be different with the wing off?

[There's a little worry in her voice.]

MRS. PHELAN

Ye should see the way it looks. And now be tryin' the veil. I've the pins with me.

[She passes one over.]

MRS. MACMANUS

Ye're good to me, Mrs. Phelan, takin' all this pains.

MRS. PHELAN

Oh, I'm enjoyin' it fine, Mrs. MacManus! Now take the short end—that's it—and put it—See if I can be reachin' you. Now pin that back—there. Ah, now, will ye look! Ye were born for the style! Ye should never wear anything else.

MRS. MACMANUS

[Pleased.]

Ye like it fine? I'll have another pin if ye have it.

MRS. PHELAN

The white neck of ye.

MRS. MACMANUS

It would look well?

MRS. PHELAN

And the hair of ye, lickin' out like a little flame—and dancin' on y'r ear.

MRS. MACMANUS

[With desire.]

I wonder could I be seein' meself?

MRS. PHELAN

And what's to prevent?

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Smiling.*]

Nothin' that I know.

[*She turns toward the room.*]

I'll be gettin' the glass.

MRS. PHELAN

[*In horror.*]

Glory be to God, Mrs. MacManus, stop!

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Turning a face of pure disappointment.*]

I could be goin' in on me toes. He's sleepin' fine.

MRS. PHELAN

Would ye kill the man, and this his last moment!
Whst, wait. I'll be bringin' me own glass.

[*She disappears. MRS. MACMANUS fixes the folds, seeing them with her fingers. She hums a bit as she tries to see the effect of the long ripple of goods down her back. MRS. PHELAN reappears, holding out the glass.*]

Here, darlin'. Take the side look first. Ain't that pretty? And the white neck of ye gleamin' against the dark.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Surveying it with pleasure.*]

In his health, he will be always kissin' it, will Pat.

MRS. PHELAN

And why not—and you lookin' like the queen of all Ireland—and the king dead.

[*The door bell in the kitchen rings sharp. MRS. MACMANUS, with a start, clutches her bosom.*]

MRS. MACMANUS

Mary, save me! What's that?

[They wait, listening.]

MRS. PHELAN

[Slowly.]

It's maybe the doctor.

[MRS. MACMANUS turns abruptly, about to go in. MRS. PHELAN speaks in sharp alarm.]

Hould, woman! And you meetin' the doctor like that, he'll be havin' you up for murder.

MRS. MACMANUS

[Going to pieces, in wild excitement and tearing the thing off her head.]

Ye'll all have the heart torn out of me, pullin' me this way and that.

[She thrusts over the hat and veil. The doorbell rings a second time. She disappears and the dumb-waiter door shuts.]

MRS. PHELAN

[The hat on her hand and straightening out the folds.]

The Houly Mother protect them both, him dyin' and her breakin' her heart for the loss of him.

[Giving a last look at the hat and veil, exhibited on her hand.]

The poor, pretty young thing!

[She closes the door, disappearing. The shaft grows dark and the wind keens a bit stronger. Door fourth floor left opens.]

VOICE OF MAN FOURTH FLOOR LEFT

Well? No, Biddie, there's no one at the whistle.
And I says to the boss—

[Door closes. Silence. MRS. PHELAN opens her door slowly, cautiously. She listens. Quiet. She gives a long mournful sigh and closes the door. The baby on sixth floor left starts crying.]

VOICE OF MAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

[Near door.]

What the divil's the matter with him now?

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

Nothin's the matter, save his father's bad temp—

[Quiet. MRS. PHELAN opens her door, listens, shakes her head with sorrowful satisfaction.]

MRS. PHELAN

Rest his soul. Whsst, Johnny!

[Johnny galumps near.]

Shh, a man's dyin' within. Be goin' down to the door and see if the black crêpe's up.

[MRS. PHELAN takes out a handkerchief and still listening keenly, begins to weep and sniff.]

VOICE OF JOHNNY

[In a penetrating whisper.]

Not yet, mither! I looked before.

MRS. PHELAN

[Disappointed, but feelingly.]

It's a long passing.

[She closes door. Silence.]

VOICE OF LITTLE GIRL

[Fourth floor left.]

It's me prayers I'm doin', mither.

[Pause.]

VOICE OF MAN FOURTH FLOOR LEFT

Good-night, sweet Biddie Murphy.

[Silence. The wind keens a bit. Sleepy fretting of a child. Slipped feet on oil-cloth, left. MRS. PHELAN, her hair done smooth in a tight pig-tail and in her night-gown, opens door. Listens. Muffled comes the sound of a dog howling.]

MRS. PHELAN

[Crossing herself; on a voice that keens.]

God rest his soul!

THE CURTAIN DROPS AND IMMEDIATELY RISES, TO INDICATE MORNING.

[Baby sixth floor left, wails and the father is heard walking up and down and crooning to it. It quiets. It is still. Silence. A dog gives two sharp barks. Silence. Faint but persistent comes the amorous antiphony of two cats. A pale white light steals down the shaft. The steam is heard cracking and clanking in the cold pipes. The door sixth floor left opens, and a yellow light streams down. The man pulls up the empty dumb-waiter.]

VOICE OF MAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

Damn that milkman! Why in hell can't he—

[Door slams shut. Immediately from the cellar comes a cheery young whistle, and the waiter flies down; four pairs of milk bottles are put on. The cellar door bangs shut.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

[Sleepy, sour.]

It's the milkman now, Mike.

VOICE OF MAN SIXTH FLOOR LEFT

I'm not goin' ter pull up that damned waiter again if—

[The door is shut. The baker's boy puts on the bread. He blows the eight whistles with vigor and delight. The door sixth floor right opens.]

VOICE OF WOMAN SIXTH FLOOR RIGHT

[The easy, cheerful, young voice.]

It's the bread, Maggie. I'll be pullin' it up.

[MRS. PHELAN'S door is seen opening on a crack. As the waiter passes the stage level, the hands of Johnny Phelan shoot out and he grabs off his mother's milk and bread. The waiter is yanked past and up and the pleasant voice grows angry.]

I saw you, Johnny Phelan—you good-for-nothin' lazy lout.

[The hand and arm of Johnny Phelan project through the crack into the dumb-waiter shaft and the fingers of the hand temporarily attached to a nose wriggle in disdain.]

And if ever I get me two hands into your hair—
[Her door shuts. JOHNNY PHELAN executes, unscen, a shuffle on the oilcloth.]

MRS. PHELAN

[Appearing suddenly.]

Ye black-hearted boy, dancin', and the man lyin' there in his coffin cold dead.

[MRS. PHELAN leans over and listens. In surprise.]

There's no keenin'—Not a sob. There's something wrong!

[She knocks, calling]

Mrs.—Mac—Man—us.

[The door, right, opens suddenly and sharply and MRS. MACMANUS is seen. She has on a housedress and apron and her sleeves are rolled up. Her eyes are bright, her cheeks flushed; her manner brisk, angry.]

MRS. MACMANUS

Good-mornin', Mrs. Phelan, if ye can call it a good mornin' when y'r asked to go six ways at once and only one pair of feet for the goin'!

MRS. PHELAN

[With a fine regret in her voice.]

Then ye've saved him?

MRS. MACMANUS

Saved him! It's meself that needs savin' now. What with—"The newspaper, darlin'"—and—"A drink of water, me pretty"—and—"Is the coffee ready, mavourneen"—and—It's meat he's yellin' for now!

MRS. PHELAN

Doctor Platz is the rare wonder.

MRS. MACMANUS.

He's not. 'Twas nothin' but the two tonsils in his throat started all the roarin' and rampin' and preparin' us for his death.

[*There's an empty pause.*]

MRS. PHELAN

[*Looking down the shaft; in a lying voice.*]

Now—did I hear the ice-man, Mrs. MacManus?

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Looking down and lying too.*]

I think maybe ye did. No, 'twas something else.

MRS. PHELAN

[*Beckoning her closer.*]

I'll be takin' it back to me cousin, the morn.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Regretfully, in pleasant reminiscence.*]

It did become me, did it not, Mrs. Phelan?

MRS. PHELAN

That it did, Mrs. MacManus.

MRS. MACMANUS

[*Hesitating.*]

Could I—be seein' it a minute?

MRS. PHELAN

[*Turning left and taking the hat and veil from the table near.*]

I have it ready—sewed and the iron goin' over it.

MRS. MACMANUS

I wonder if—

[*She listens back.*]

He's readin' the paper.

MRS. PHELAN

[Handing over the hat and veil.]

I've the glass with me.

[MRS. MACMANUS puts on the hat and veil, straightening the folds.]

MRS. MACMANUS

It does hang nice and rich.

MRS. PHELAN

Ah, Mrs. MacManus, I'll never be happy till I see the like of it on y'r head again!

MRS. MACMANUS

[With a nervous glance over her shoulder.]

Be givin' me the glass!

[She takes it and smiles as she sees the reflection.]

It does look grand. It sets me fine. Mrs. Phelan, I never put a thing on me head that pleased me more.

VOICE OF PAT

[From some distance; kind.]

Katy, darlin'!

MRS. MACMANUS

[In utter terror.]

It's himself!

VOICE OF PAT

[A little nearer; more insistent.]

Katy—

MRS. MACMANUS

[To him as she grabs off the hat and veil.]

Stand where ye are!—It's caught, Mrs. Phelan.

[Loud, back to Pat.]

Out of the draft.

[After a moment fraught with agony, the veil is freed. She bundles it and the hat together and thrusts them over to MRS. PHELAN.]

Tell y'r cousin—

VOICE OF PAT

[Irritable.]

Kate—

MRS. MACMANUS

I'm comin', man!

The hat's hers and I'm thankin' her for the loan and sorry I can't be usin' it.

[Turning towards the room, with terrible irony.]

Is it y'r five pounds of steak, Pat, y're wantin' now?

[The door shuts behind her.]

MRS. PHELAN

Poor soul!

[Looking at the door angrily.]

And him that hearty!

[She gives the veil a last sad look and fixing it as it hangs grand on her hand.]

Ah, you never know the wurst till it comes.

[As she shuts the door in reproach and disappointment.]

The poor, pretty young thing.

[As the curtain begins to descend two sharp whistles are heard.]

VOICE OF JANITOR

Garbage!

CURTAIN.

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